

Looking forward by looking back: What aspect of Hartford's history is most significant to preserve for the next 375 years and why?

Hartford certainly has been a city of history. Known as the Insurance Capitol of the World, Hartford has evolved from a small trading town on the Connecticut River to a bustling urban center. Firearms manufacturing giants, such as Colt and Sharps, gave rise to industry in Hartford. Did you know that America's first bicycle manufacturing began in Hartford? Albert Pope began selling his first bicycle model, the "Columbia High-Wheeler" in 1878 out of Hartford.ⁱ Many historically significant people have also called Hartford home. Mark Twain, one of America's most famous authors and humorists, called Hartford home, as well as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Katherine Hepburn, to name a few. Hartford also boasts the Wadsworth Atheneum, the country's oldest public art museum, and Hartford Public High School, one of the country's oldest secondary schools. Although Hartford is definitely a historically significant city, Hartford is more truly defined by its people. What needs to be preserved for the next 375 years is the diversity that binds this city together to work towards the future prosperity and greatness of the City of Hartford.

If one could walk through time, as the sun rose and set every day, the Hartford community would be noted to have an ever diversifying population. From Hartford's founding in 1636 by Thomas Hooker to the modern day metropolis, the faces that roam our streets have developed a wide range of features. Hartford originated as a small agriculturally based society, but soon developed into a significant trading post along the Connecticut River.ⁱⁱ Hartford's transformation into a center for Trans-Atlantic trade made it an appealing location for many incoming immigrants from all around Europe. One of the larger groups to immigrate to Hartford was Italians. They firmly established themselves and their culture into Hartford and up to this day their effect on Hartford is still very well known among the community. In the South End of Hartford lies Franklin Avenue, otherwise known to the people of Hartford as "Little Italy", where several Italian influenced restaurants and business still reside. If you took a short walk down Wethersfield Avenue near Colt Park you would see buildings devoted to various ethnicities, such as Polish, Ukrainian, and in more recent times, Puerto Ricans and other Latinos. Latin Americans have become a significant part of the population of Hartford, encompassing roughly 45.5% of the population as of 2006.ⁱⁱⁱ And just as the Italians, Latinos have well established themselves into the surrounding community. In locations like Park Street, the presence of Latinos is evident through the food, music, businesses, and the celebration of heritage through flags and parades. As I consider the individuals that I have befriended, the extent to where they all originated from amazes me. From Vietnam to Pakistan, Bosnia to Greece, and Puerto Rico to Venezuela, we have individuals and cultures coming from all corners of world. The diversity in Hartford is amazing and something to be extraordinarily proud of. Though not necessarily a physical object, the history of "who" Hartford was is most definitely worth maintaining and passing down throughout the years that will follow.

Hartford's diversity does not merely stop at ethnicity; it transcends several other areas, including religious views. It is apparent that religious views still divide humans around the world. There is continuous negative back and forth between religious groups, but despite this there are people of different faiths working together toward peaceful co-existence in Hartford. A great project has been taken up by the Charter Oak Cultural Center which has gathered four individuals representing Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Catholicism and plans to construct an art piece called "Sacred Ground".^{iv} This will gather religious paintings and symbols into a cube representing a co-existence between not just these religions, but all other religious views as well. What's so special about this project? It is not just another work of art attempting to be profound; instead it properly represents the Hartford community. From what I have observed and experienced, there are friendships among people of completely different faiths that other people might not expect.

Preserving Hartford's important historical objects is of major importance, as physical objects provide greater insight into the past. But an idea unlike a building or work of art is not prone to catching fire or degradation, especially in modern times where everything is recorded and information can travel across entire oceans without changes in perception. In the coming 375 years, it is not just historically significant structures that need to be preserved, it is the spirit and culture of the people who have, are, and will encompass our society that should be eternally preserved. As time progresses and the City of Hartford continues to transform, something should be created to stand as a testament to this era of Hartford's history.

ⁱ Albert Pope and the Pope Manufacturing Company. Pope Park. Web. November 16, 2010.

ⁱⁱ City of Hartford History. City of Hartford. Web. November 15, 2010.

ⁱⁱⁱ State and County QuickFacts." U.S. Census Bureau. Web. November 16, 2010.

^{iv} Carlesso, Jenna. "Artists Collaborate On Interfaith Project At Hartford Cultural Center." Hartford Courant. October 19, 2010. Web. November 16, 2010.